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10 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**

11 **DISTRICT OF NEVADA**

12 AALIYAH GATHERS,)
13 Plaintiff,) Case No.: 3:20-cv-00365-WGC
14 vs.)
15 ANDREW SAUL,) **ORDER GRANTING UNOPPOSED MOTION**
16 Commissioner of Social Security,) **FOR EXTENSION OF TIME TO FILE**
Defendant.) **CERTIFIED ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD**
17) **AND ANSWER; DECLARATIONS OF JEBBY**
18) **RASPUTNIS AND CHRISTIANNE VOEGELE**
19) **(FIRST REQUEST)**
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1 Defendant, Andrew Saul, Commissioner of Social Security (the “Commissioner”), by and through
2 his undersigned attorneys, hereby moves for a sixty-day extension of time to file the Certified
3 Administrative Record (CAR) and answer to Plaintiff’s Complaint. The CAR and answer to Plaintiff’s
4 Complaint are due to be filed by October 19, 2020.

5 In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Social Security Administration (“SSA” or the
6 “Agency”) has taken the unprecedented step of suspending in-office services to the public:
7 <https://www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/>. The Agency is focusing on providing the most critical services by
8 mail, phone and online to those most in need. SSA is also taking additional steps to protect its employees
9 and help stop the spread of COVID-19, maximizing social distancing, including significantly limiting
10 employee access to SSA facilities for health and safety only and has moved toward a temporary virtual
11 work environment. Electronic processes allow some of SSA’s most critical work to continue with
12 minimal interruption; other workloads have been suspended until the health crisis abates or the Agency is
13 able to create new electronic business processes.

14 For purposes of this particular case, the public health emergency pandemic has significantly
15 impacted operations in the Social Security Administration’s Office of Appellate Operations (OAO) in
16 Falls Church, Virginia. That office is responsible for physically producing the administrative record that
17 is required to adjudicate the case under Sections 205(g) and (h) of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C.
18 § 405(g) and (h). *See* SSA Program Operations Manual System GN 03106.025, available at
<https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/lnx/0203106025>.

19 As detailed in the attached declarations, beginning March 16, 2020, OAO’s staff members began
20 to telework to protect employee health and prevent further spread of COVID-19. At that time, critical in-
21 person physical tasks associated with preparing the administrative record could not be accomplished. For
22 example, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, to safeguard Personally Identifiable Information (PII), all
23 hearing recordings, which are part of the administrative record, were downloaded onto compact discs and
24 encrypted. OAO securely routed the encrypted discs to a private contractor through a daily pickup and
25 delivery service at the Official Duty Station (ODS) in Falls Church, Virginia. The private contractor
26 would transcribe the hearing recording and send the paper copy of the hearing transcript back to OAO.

1 OAO personnel would then scan the hearing transcript into the electronic record or place the hearing
2 transcript in the paper case file. Thereafter, OAO personnel would assemble the administrative record in
3 a prescribed order.

4 To ensure a continuity of operations, OAO has been actively pursuing mitigation efforts to allow
5 the remote preparation of administrative records. For cases in which the private contractors were already
6 in possession of hearing recordings for transcription, with the assistance of the Office of Acquisitions and
7 Grants (OAG), OAO received approval to receive these transcripts from the private contractors via
8 secured email, e.g., using password protection and redacted Social Security Numbers. In April 2020,
9 OAO began receiving such hearing transcripts from private contractors via secured email.

10 For cases in which OAO had not yet submitted recordings to the private contractors before March
11 16, 2020, OAO has been pursuing all available options to obtain transcriptions for these cases. In May
12 2020, OAO began encrypting hearing recordings and securely emailing them to the contractors for
13 transcription. Through the month of May, OAO and the contractors worked to resolve technical issues
14 that arose, particularly with large files. The process is functioning now, albeit at only half of normal
15 productivity.

16 Given the volume of pending cases, Defendant requests an extension in which to respond to the
17 Complaint until December 18, 2020. If in sixty days the CAR is not prepared, the Commissioner will file
18 a status report with the Court as to when he expects the CAR to be completed.

19 On October 8, 2020, the undersigned conferred with Plaintiff's mother, Hyapatia Gathers,
20 concerning the requested extension. Ms. Gathers does not oppose the requested extension.

21 It is therefore respectfully requested that Defendant be granted an extension of time to file the CAR
22 and answer to Plaintiff's Complaint, through and including December 18, 2020.
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1 Dated: October 9, 2020
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NICHOLAS A. TRUTANICH
United States Attorney

/s/ Allison J. Cheung
ALLISON J. CHEUNG
Special Assistant United States Attorney

10 IT IS SO ORDERED:
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UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

13 DATED: October 13, 2020.
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